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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger effort to determine marital and procreative trends in the South, an historical comparison was made of two samples of Northeast Alabama high school seniors. Similar questionnaires were group administered to all seniors present on the prescribed contact day in 19 randomly selected high schools in 1966 and again in 1972. The study population was predominantly white residing in rural areas and small towns (Cherokee, DeKalb, Jackson, and Marshall Counties). Questionnaire items included the following components: (1) Desired age at marriage; (2) Desired number of children; (3) Desires as to wife working after marriage; (4) Attitude toward women working with no small children in the family; (5) Importance of marriage and family in the value structure; and (6) Attitude toward a mother working if the family could use the money for necessities. Findings indicated that the attitudes of youth in the more current of the two samples were different from their predecessors on most variables considered, as they were oriented toward younger marriages and smaller families, and they accepted and approved the working wife and mother. It was found that the acceptance of urbanized attitudes and values was widespread, and it was projected that this will continue to be the case, particularly as additional employment opportunities for women develop in rural areas. (JC)

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PANEL PRESENTATION

Marital and Procreative Projections of Northeast Alabama Youth: A Historical Comparison, 1966-1972*

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The findings presented in this discussion involve a cross-sectional comparison of youth's aspirations, expectations and attitudes toward marriage and procreative behavior. A common geographic area was used to determine the nature of these behavioral orientations at two points in time. Two independent samples of youth in their late teens living in rural areas and small towns were contacted in 1966 and 1972. The purpose of the study was to provide an indication of the marriage and procreative orientations of these youth and to test for the consistency of these orientations between the two points in time.

Data Source

The study involved high school seniors residing in four contigious counties in Northeast Alabama--Cherokee, DeKalb, Jackson and Marshall. Life in this area corresponds to that characterizing much of Southern Appalachia.1/

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*Information presented in a Panel Discussion before the Rural Sociology Section, Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 1975. The research was conducted as Hatch Project 327 (S-81), Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station.

1/Selection of the 4 county area was made in 1965 by a multidisciplinary research team undertaking a broadly based study of social and economic development in Alabama's Appalachian Region.

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The area is mountainous and rural with a heavy economic dependence on agriculture and small textile manufacturing. People in the area are predominantly white, but low-incomes prevail and living conditions are poor.

Procedures

In 1966, a listing of all high schools operating in the 4-county area was developed. Of the 33 schools indentified, two represented independent city systems (located in towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants) and four were segregated Negro schools. Each of these schools was included in the study.

The remainining 27 high schools were affiliated with county-wide school systems. Each school was ranked from largest to smallest on the basis of combined January 1, 1966 enrollment in the 10th and 12th grades. Thirteen county high schools were randomly selected by beginning with the second largest and selecting every other one. With one exception, all county schools were located in non-urban areas. Nineteen schools were included in the 1966 contact.

A second contact was made with seniors in the same high school in 1972. This was a period when racial integration of schools was in progress and this area was no exception. All of the Negro schools had been closed and the students assigned to previously all white schools in each county.

In addition, the one county high school located in an urban place had withdrawn from the county system and become an independent city system. No private schools had developed in the area in response to desegregation. Racial integration of the schools represents the only major structural change in the community and in the educational experience of local youth. This impact was minimal because of the small number of black residents in the area.

Questionnaires were group administered in each contact year to all seniors present in school on the contact day. In 1966 Alabama was not a participating member of the regional research project (S-61). The member states used identical questionnaires. Alabama, on the other hand, utilized a questionnaire which was patterned after and similar but not identical

to the regional questionnaire. Alabama adopted the regional questionnaire for use in 1972. All effort was made to insure coding similarity between the two data sets.

Composition of the study populations in 1966 and 1972 is presented in Table 1. Particular note should be made of the fact that the number of blacks in this Alabama sample was quite small. In order to be consistent with reports from other states, a racial comparison by sex and year was made, however, given the small sub-sample of blacks in Alabama, the comparisons are interesting but unreliable.

Table 1. Race - Sex Distribution of Alabama Study Population by Study Year

Sex	Total		Black		White	
	1966	1972	1966	1972	1966	1972
	Number					
Male	438	470	18	23	240	447
Female	486	448	41	22	445	426
Total	924	918	59	45	865	873

Summary of Findings

Desired Age at Marriage

There was a tendency for the current sample of youth to desire to marry at a younger age than their predecessors. This difference was consistant for all race-sex groupings except white girls. Here a slight change toward earlier marriage at one extreme was countered by a change toward marriage at 25 years of age or older. In general, girls desired to marry younger than boys. Black boys by far were most oriented to marriage at an older age and white girls at a younger age.

Desired Number of Children

The pattern in desired family size was toward fewer children for all race-sex groupings except black males. This can best be observed in the proportion of youth desiring four or more children which had decreased by more than 10 percent. Variance from this pattern by black boys could have been the result of the small subsample of only 17 cases. Moreover, all groupings exhibited some increase in the proportion desiring only one child or no children.

Desire about a Wife Working After Marriage

Increased acceptance of married women in the employed labor force is well indicated in these data. The current sample of youth was much more likely to favor the wife working outside the home than the first sample. This difference was a consistant 20 percent for all race-sex groupings. Girls were virtually unanimous in their opinion that a wife should work outside the home compared to only about half the boys. Racial differences were minor when sex was held constant.

Attitude Toward Women Working with No Small Children in Family

Three statements describing opinions relating to the conditions under which a wife might seek employment were used. Youth were requested to either agree or disagree with each statement:

(a) A wife should never work outside the home.

(b) A wife should work outside the home only if the family needs money for necessities such as food and clothing.

(c) A wife should get a job if she needs one to be happy.

An underlying continuum was assumed among the three statements varying from a very negative, conservative attitude toward a wife working to a positive, liberal

the family was at different ages. Each youth was asked to either agree or disagree with the four statements:

(1) A mother could work if she has children too young for school.

(2) A mother could work if she has only school-age children.

(3) A mother could work if she has only teen-age children.

(4) A mother could work if all her children are grown and have left home.

Again the existence of an underlying continuum was assumed among the four statements. The points along the continuum represent key stages in the family cycle during which the possibility of the mother taking a job might be considered. Each position represents a more generally accepted position ranging from the traditionally strong taboo against working when there are young children to the widely approved pattern of employment during the post children years. Essentially, this continuum reflects the decision-making dilemas confronted by many women during the past generation.

These data reveal that, except for black males, youth in the current sample were more favorable to a mother working outside the home than was the earlier sample. A favorable attitude toward working when there were pre-school children at home had increased considerably among the girls. More than a third approved of a mother working under this condition. Boys were much less favorable toward this as only about 14% approved. More than 70% of the girls and half the boys approved of the mother working when all the children were school age. Only a small proportion of these youth indicated a mother should not work until all the children were grown.

Importance of Marriage and Family in the Value Structure

Values of people are difficult to determine. One approach used in survey research to indicate the relative

attitude. The mid-point is reflected by a moderate position rationalizing her working because of economic necessity. Procedurally, responses to each statement were rated sequentially by determining the number of respondents who agreed with the most conservative statemen from among those who disagreed with the first statement, and similarly, the number who agreed with the third statement from among those who disagreed with both the first and second statements. The few respondents who did not agree with any of the statements were classified as "don't know" and excluded from the analysis.

Except for black boys, attitudes of the current sample of youth were decidedly more liberal toward the wife being employed outside the home than the earlier sample. The change was rather dramatic, especially among the girls. More than half the girls now indicated a wife should work if she needed a job to be happy. White girls were more likely than black girls and white boys than black boys to hold this attitude.

Inspite of this trend toward a more liberal orientation there was still an appreciable proportion (24%) of the boys who reflected the traditional view that a wife should not work outside the home. Because of the relatively slight change at the conservative level, it is apparent that change was primarily in that todays youth found it less necessary to give the middle-of-the-road attitude requiring "need" as the rationalization. Rather, those who favored married women working did so without compromise. This liberal attitude is very much in keeping with the women's rights movement that characterized the early 70"s.

Attitude toward a Mother Working if Family could Use Money for Necessities

Moving one step further with the attitude toward the woman working outside the home, consideration was given to the perceived affect of children at different family stages. A strong value for motherhood and the woman's responsibility to her children has been believed to play a significant role in employment behavior for women. In order to measure this attitude a series of four statements were presented in which the youngest child in

importance an individual assigns to various aspects of social life involves a ranking of several generalized goal objects. In this instance seven goals were identified:

> To have lots of free time to do what I want.
>
> To get all the education I want.
>
> To earn as much money as I can.
>
> To get the job I want most.
>
> To live in the kind of place I like best.
>
> To have the kind of house, car, furniture, and other things that I want.
>
> To get married and raise a family.

The relative value placed on marriage and family was determined by having each youth indicate the rank he or she would give to the importance of this aspect of social life relative to the other six goal objects. Rankings of either first or second in importance were considered a high value and rankings of six or seven as a low value.

No consistant pattern of change was observed for the four race-sex groupings. Boys tended to rank marriage and family slightly higher than boys in the previous sample, whereas girls rated it just slightly lower. White youth rated this value higher than black youth. Very few black youth of either sex gave marriage and family a high rating compared to 41 and 27 percent of the white girls and boys respectively. Black girls were considerably less likely than black boys to rate this goal object of lowest value.

Conclusions

Two independent samples of youth attending the same high schools, but separated in time by an interval of six year, responded to highly similar questionnaires

and virtually identical items. Under such conditions a situation of consistency was achieved which allowed for time comparisons and the assessment of attitude change in populations over time. In this instance the question asked was to what extent the attitudes of rural and small town youth reflect static or dynamic orientations?

From these data it can be concluded that the attitudes of youth in the more current of the two samples were different from their precessors on most variables considered. Moreover, the change was in a direction consistant with the liberal, women's rights thrust of the general society. It appears that these youth are oriented toward younger marriage but smaller families and are more accepting and approving of the wife and mother working outside the home. The acceptance of urbanized attitudes and values is widespread and will probably become more so as additional employment opportunities for women develop in rural areas.